

# Requiem for Ryan Lab

I was saddened to read that Ryan Lab will be demolished. As I recall, Prof. Ryan was really responsible for the first step that led to the unique development of the electrical/electronic engineering department at Stanford.

When Boulder Dam (Hoover Dam) was being built to provide electricity for Los Angeles, there was concern about the loss in transmission over that long a distance. At that time, greater amounts of electricity were carried by using larger diameter wire, which meant high expense for the wire, great cost for the posts which had to be close together to support it, and still higher loss of energy.

Prof. Ryan was one of the few experimenting with high-voltage transmission and received a grant for further investigation. His research led to the discovery that the electricity traveled on the surface of the wire rather than in the wires to a pipe. And with the development of hollow wire, it was possible to transmit higher voltages with less loss and with a lighter weight wire to place the towers on the transmission line much further apart.

Fifty years ago, when I was at Stanford, the EE Department was just developing, and among the early products were the Varian brothers and Hansen, as well as Hewlett and Packard. Since then, the interplay between entrepreneurial and inventive companies and the University led to the development of Silicon Valley.

Isn't it a shame that something as historic as Ryan Lab should be torn down?

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